

Word Count: 754

THE JUNK-MAIL CONNECTION

If you're concerned about junk-mail privacy in an email world, look first to the Mailing List Industry. Electronic junk mail will be like paper junk mail; databases kept by computer networks embody the same issues as databases kept by magazines and mailing list companies. Electronic net or footnet -- mailing list policy issues are the same.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Mailing List Industry, and they know about you. But they don't necessarily care. I once subscribed to TV Guide under the name of "A.Gronk" because I feared a deluge of mail. Know what? Mr. Gronk didn't get a thing. Advertisers want hot lists of hot prospects-- those who've already bought, or who're at least on other lists. My Mr. Gronk, seen on no other lists, didn't qualify for anything.

The mailing-list industry needs to know about you so as not to bother you. Susan Anstrand, CEO, Names in the News, a list broker for non-profit organizations, speaks eloquently for the industry: "On the one side we hear I don't want Junk Mail, which means, I don't want to get mail that isn't targeted to ME. So we have this sort of mission to target people, so how do you target people except by knowing more about them, right?"

TWO FACES OF AN INDUSTRY

The mailing-list industry is everywhere. It's as near to you the recipient as your mailbox; it's as near to you the businessperson (which most of us are in some way or other) as your yellow pages. The mailing-list industry has two faces: the way it looks to you the recipient-- pestering and enticing; and the way it looks to you the businessperson -- the lifeline to old customers and new prospects.

It's amazing what mailing lists you can rent. (Or databases, which in this context means information-rich lists.) One company offers such lists as NURSES WHO INVEST and MILLIONAIRE RISK-TAKERS. Where lists once came from, don't ask; some work and some don't; and they'll all cost you. Mailing lists are one of the biggest expenses in marketing. Those who own lists spend a lot to

put them together, verify and maintain them. So usually you only get to USE the list, not keep it; you get to keep the replies, if any.

Each copy of a list usually has its own phony names, so if you use the list more than once, they'll know. Also you're not supposed to cherry-pick. "Cherry picking" means getting the best names from lists, usually by intercomparing them. Which you're not allowed to do; even though you're taking out the duplicates ("merge-purge"), you mustn't make note of them.

If this is confusing, the pros in the industry have an honor system: break the code and you're out of the business.

GETTING OFF LISTS

If you are seriously concerned about advertisers knowing about you (as I am not), then PAY CASH, SUBSCRIBE TO EVERY MAGAZINE UNDER A DIFFERENT NAME, DON'T GIVE TO CHARITY BY CHECK, AND DON'T OWN A HOME.

More simply, just ask to be taken off the lists. Write to the Direct Marketing Association in New York City. All volume mailers and list marketers will be notified, and your name will be blocked on every commercial mailing list.

Susan Anstrand thinks there will be ways to block specific categories. "There are people that don't want to get mail about animal rights groups, but may want to get mail about saving pandas ... animal-rights groups tend to be much activist and much more graphic. You know, they show little hung puppies, or little, you know, wok stir-fried dogs. ... You know, some of this stuff goes to kids..."

DIRECT MARKETING

What was called Direct Mail is now Direct Marketing, a branch of the advertising industry. Direct Marketing includes 800 numbers, infomercials, and telemarketing -- the voice on the line that reads you a script and asks for an order.

Direct Marketing is the shirtsleeve side of the ad biz, as distinct from the silk tie and Power Lunch side, and the silk-tie ad guys resent it somewhat, especially since it's an ever-beckoning, constant alternative to media advertising -- magazines, papers, TV and radio.

Direct marketing has grown phenomenally in recent decades, and to some it's a religion. Enthusiasts (like ad maverick Andy Berlin) say advertising has to have much tighter feedback; this means DM may take over advertising. Bad news for the silk-tie crowd, but hardly shattering to the rest of us.